

MEDIA LITERACY

What is it?

Media literacy involves the skills required to use, understand and create media texts in a variety of different contexts (Ofsted, 2013).

Media literacy is concerned with teaching about the media: it investigates how language, images and sound are juxtaposed to create meaning. It explores the conventions of different media texts and the variety of interpretations that are available. It asks students to consider how sections of the audience might interpret the same media message differently and consider how a person's perspective, lifestyle, ideological framework, upbringing and social situation might influence this. Furthermore, media literacy encourages students to reflect upon the purpose of media texts and the relationship between the industry, the author and the audience.

In order to understand media texts, students must analyse them and also create their own, evaluating their work and reflecting upon their skills and knowledge.

Why teach it?

With young people currently spending an estimated nine hours per day engaging with media texts (Common Sense Media, 2015), they have unquestionably become a pervasive and powerful force. As with traditional literacy skills of reading and writing, students have the right to develop, through media literacy, the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in contemporary society through an understanding of the texts that surround them.

In many cases, students are active users of media texts; they already have some level of understanding and have developed media habits, tastes and preferences. Media literacy empowers the students to move beyond these experiences to a new and deeper understanding of the media landscape; they analyse the media and are able to produce texts that tell their own stories.

Not only does media literacy have relevancy and currency in the modern world, it enables students to develop vital, cross-curricular and life skills such as critical thinking, empathy, independence, communication and creativity.

How should it be taught?

Traditional literacy skills (reading and writing) are a whole-school, cross-curricular responsibility because it is vital that young people leave education with a good level of skill and understanding in these areas. Media literacy is just as important if students are to succeed in the modern world and, given that the media is used in *every* industry and area of employment, the development of media literacy should also be delivered across the curriculum. Media literacy should be woven throughout and taught explicitly alongside (and through) subject content.

Media literacy begins by identifying the students' current levels of use, understanding and creation, and acknowledging that the students bring their own expertise into the classroom. This should be your starting point. Because we are all media users to varying degrees, media literacy is a didactic topic where the role of student and teacher can often be reversed. That being said, teachers have a role in explicitly teaching what students do *not* know and encouraging them to explore the unknown in order to make progress.

Within media literacy, the traditional skills of reading and writing are applied to print, moving image, screen-based and electronic media texts and it involves a variety of analytical, creative, practical and evaluative activities. The topics and tasks should be relevant to the students' lives and move their knowledge and understanding forwards, making links to the key concepts of media literacy as well as the students' and teacher's enjoyment of media texts.

"With the help of media literacy education, pupils are given equal opportunities for the safe use of media, as well as spontaneous self-expression, the forming of independent viewpoints, and taking part in civil issues through media. Media literacy education is a cultural right alluded to in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child."

(UNESCO, 2012)

"Media education is not about teaching kids how to watch TV, but about using the media to help kids make sense of the world around them, and to help them be better learners themselves. It's about developing savvy."

Chris Worksnop (1989)

"It is precisely because our culture surrounds us with media that we need to extend traditional literacy skills beyond reading, writing, and discussing printed texts."

Faith Rogow (2011)

"In media [literacy], information is transmitted laterally to both students and teachers alike. The teacher's role is not to advocate a particular view, but to promote reflection upon media texts, and develop the kind of questioning and analytical skills which will help students clarify their own views."

Len Masterman (2013)

THE KEY CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY

The key concepts provide a conceptual framework of media literacy for teachers and students. They work together to form the underpinning of all media education and are the building blocks of a deep, meaningful and thorough understanding of media messages and texts. Each of the key concepts has equal weight and merit, and if students are to gain a fully rounded understanding and high levels of media literacy, each should be explicitly taught alongside and through subject specific content.

AUDIENCE

AUTHORSHIP

FORMAT

CONTENT

PURPOSE

In order to develop the range of media literacy skills, students will need to undertake analytical tasks to deconstruct real media texts according to the key concepts above, but also create their own media products. In this way, media literacy develops their knowledge, understanding and practical skills, cementing this through application and evaluation.

AUDIENCE

Media texts have target audiences and this is often reflected in the content. However, audience members interpret media messages differently based on their values, beliefs and experiences. Empathising with others is an important skill in media literacy that allows students to consider the viewpoints of other audience sectors.

Student should also consider their own interpretation of media texts.

CONTENT

All media texts present ideologies, perspectives and biases. Often, these are the values of the media producers and are communicated by the media text to the audience. One could consider the extent to which these media messages have the potential to change the audience's belief systems or opinions.

It is important to consider what is omitted alongside what it present, as well as *how* the messages are presented: do they use stereotypes? How/why? How do the images work alongside the text or sound?



Adapted from 'Media Literacy Research and Example 1-31' (EduGains, n.d.).

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AUTHORSHIP

It is important to remember that media texts are constructions and each one has an author who can affect the message by encoding it with their own personal values and beliefs.

Texts also belong to a wider industry or institution (e.g. the Hollywood film industry or the BBC).

FORMAT

Each media text or platform has a different language and a different set of conventions. What is possible in moving image adverts for example, may not be possible in print products. So, how does each compete with the other? And how can all media texts grab the audience's attention?

PURPOSE

Generally, media texts are intended to benefit the interests of both the consumer and the producer of the media.

Just as with traditional written texts, media texts can persuade, inform, educate or entertain. It is important to consider the purpose of the text alongside who it is intended for.